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ABSTRACT

The enhancement of the self-concepts of elementary school students through the "Let's Get Excited about Life" program and the recognition of such enhancement by their teachers were studied for 100 inner-city students in Atlanta (Georgia) in grades 1 through 5. All of these students, as well as their teachers, were African-Americans, and ninety percent of these students came from single-parent families. "Let's Get Excited about Life" is a self-esteem program that presents positive-attitude, self-image, goal-setting, stress-management, and success-visualization enhancements through an audiovisual series. Students and their five teachers were surveyed about their perceptions of the students' self-concepts immediately after the series and by a followup five days after the program was completed. Results demonstrated the enhancement of self-concepts over the 10-day period for children of various ages. Previous studies had supported the usefulness of the program for second graders; this experiment shows that the program is useful for elementary students in general and also that it is suitable for African Americans in an inner-city school. (Contains 6 references.) (SLD)

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WHO DISCERNS THE ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENTS' SELF CONCEPTS IN AN INNER-CITY SCHOOL?

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Who Discerns the Enhancement of Students' Self-Concepts in an Inner-City School?

In their original study, Parish and Necessary (1992) divided a group of 648 second grade students in half. Group A was presented "The Let's Get Excited About Life" self-esteem program (developed by Necessary [1989]) over the next five weeks, while Group B received NO such treatment (i.e., it served as a control group). In the next five weeks, however, the students in Group B were presented the "Let's Get Excited About Life" program, while Group A received no additional treatment. Through repeated administrations (each five [5] weeks) of the Nonsexist Personal Attribute Inventory for Children, it was revealed that the self-concepts of both groups of students were enhanced after they had been presented with the above mentioned program, and that the self-concept elevations for Group A remained in effect even after five additional weeks with no such treatment. That children's self-concepts were able to be assessed and enhanced at such an early age was thought to be truly noteworthy, especially since few other studies had ever demonstrated similar findings.

In a subsequent study by Necessary and Parish (1992), it was further reported that this self-concept enhancement described above endured even after a year with no intervening treatment for either of the groups originally studied by Parish and Necessary (1992). Such long-term effects for children still in their primary school years seemed most encouraging since it seemed likely that as self-concepts were enhanced, so too, would these children probably benefit social-emotionally and/or academically, as a possible consequence of this enhancement.

In another study by Parish and Necessary (1993), a group of 81 second graders were once again divided in half and then presented the "Let's Get Excited About Life" program in two consecutive five week periods like that described in the original Parish and Necessary (1992) study cited above. What made this study special, however, is that both the students and the students' teachers were surveyed before and after treatment in order to ascertain if the students' self-concepts had been enhanced. As hypothesized, both the students and their teachers detected the self-concept enhancement in them (i.e., the students) after they had been presented the "Let's Get Excited About Life" program. Such findings even held for the group of students who had received the treatment five weeks prior to the final posttreatment assessment.

Notably, the studies cited above were limited to students in second grade (although the study by Necessary and Parish [1992] was actually a one-year follow-up of students in third grade, but had received treatment in second grade). The question that needs to be asked is, "Would the 'Let's Get Excited About Life' program also work on other grade levels of students, especially in an inner-city school, and would their teachers also discern these changes in their students' self-concepts?"

Method

Subjects

A total of 100 grade school students (ranging from first through fifth grade), along with their five teachers, voluntarily participated in the present study. These students attended a hub-area school in Atlanta, GA. All of these students, as well as their teachers, were African-Americans, and 90% of these students came from single-parent families. Parental consent was obtained for each student prior to their inclusion in any of the following procedures.

Procedure

Phase I. The students' teachers administered the Personal Attribute Inventory for Children (PAIC; Parish and Taylor, 1978) to their third, fourth, and fifth grade students, while the Nonsexist Personal Attribute Inventory for Children (NPAIC; Parish and Rankin, 1982) was likewise administered to the first and second grade students.

Concurrently, the students' teachers completed a copy of the same checklist that their students completed in order to describe each of their students.

For both teachers and students, adjectives were checked on the PAIC and the NPAIC that best described the students in question. In each instance, one's score was the percentage of positive words checked.

Phase II. Students were divided into two groups. Group A (i.e., the experimental group) was administered the "Let's Get Excited About Life" self-esteem program, which consisted of a five-part (30 min. ea.) audio-visual series presented over a five day period. The topics covered by this series were positive attitude, self-image, goal-setting, stress management, and ways to visualize success. While Group A was administered the program, Group B (i.e., the control group) received no such treatment. Rather, they simply went through their regular classroom procedures.

Phase III. Five days after Phase I, the students and teachers were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the students' self-concepts on either the PAIC (for grades 3-5) or the NPAIC (for grades 1-2).

Phase IV. Group B was now administered the "Let's Get Excited About Life" self-esteem program (just like Group A did in Phase II) over the next five days, while Group A received no additional treatment whatsoever.

Phase V. At the conclusion of the experiment (i.e., ten days after Phase I), all the students and teachers were surveyed a third time regarding their perceptions of the students' self-concepts on either the PAIC or the NPAIC.

Results

A series of repeated measures analyses of variance revealed the following: For the first and second grade students who were in the experimental group, they had their self-concepts significantly enhanced ($F[2, 36] = 5.40$, $p<.01$) from Phase I ($x = 75.7\%$) to Phase III ($x = 91.5\%$), and this increased positiveness continued to be demonstrated in Phase V ($x = 92.5\%$). The control group of students demonstrated a similar significant elevation ($F [2, 36] = 5.91$, $p<.01$) between Phase III ($x = 73.5\%$) and Phase V ($x = 90.9\%$) after they, too, were presented the program.

For the third, fourth, and fifth grade students who were in Group A, they, too, demonstrated a significant elevation in self-concepts ($F[2, 60] = 6.93$, $p<.005$) from Phase I ($x = 76.1\%$) to Phase III ($x = 92.3\%$) that continued through Phase V ($x = 92.1\%$), but the enhancement for Group B, though in the predicted direction between Phase III ($x = 72.1\%$) and Phase V ($x = 84.7\%$), but did not achieve significance ($F[2, 57] = 2.36$, $p>.05$).

Briefly described, no significant changes in the perceived self-concepts of students were found maong the teachers across all grade levels.

Discussion

As in the earlier studies by Necessary and Parish (1992) and Parish and Necessary (1992), the present study demonstrated that young children's self-concepts can be enhanced after they are presented the "Let's Get Excited About Life" self-esteem program. Notably, though, these changes in the present study occurred within a ten (10) day period, and not over ten weeks as in previous studies. In addition, this enhancement was generally successful with African-American children (most of whom were from single-parent families) in a hub-area school in Atlanta, Georgia in the present study, while earlier studies involved primarily European-American children who experienced very different circumstances. Finally, the findings from the present study demonstrate that the "Let's Get Excited About Life" program seems to work well for students at many grade levels, and is not limited to students in the second grade only.

While there are many reasons for encouragement given the results of the present study, there are also some points for concern. For instance, the students in grades 3, 4, and 5, who were in the Group B, did display an elevation in self-concepts, but not at a statistically significant level. Next, the teachers--across grade levels--failed to discern the enhanced self-concepts that their students generally demonstrated. Of course, these latter findings contrast sharply with teachers' perceptions of students in the Parish and Necessary (1993) study, but the teachers in these two studies vary greatly in racial origin, teaching circumstances, community settings, etc. Thus, no one can say for sure why these findings occurred, but findings such as these provide heuristic value since they raise new questions that are certainly worthy of future investigation.

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